

## **Planning practices in Galicia: How communities compensate the lack of statutory planning using bottom up planning initiatives**

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### **Abstract**

*Short title: Formal and Informal Planning Practices in Galicia*

Planning practices performed by non-governmental actors are often not considered as part the spatial planning domain. Spatial planning is generally associated with governmental activity: coordination that is aimed at a formal regulation of land uses and distribution of public goods. Nevertheless, the influence of other actors, like communities, is becoming increasingly important in planning studies. In this paper we argue that planning practices performed by local communities do deliver an important contribution to the improvement of local living circumstances. From the perspective of dialectics we explore how planning practices performed by communities and governments evolve and continuously shape and reshape the performance of spatial planning. These processes are studied qualitatively in rural Galicia, an Autonomous Region in North-Western Spain. Here we studied how two local communities developed and implemented their own plans for local public services and economic development. These two cases were studied in-depth through interviews with involved community members and field visits. Case study results show that a comprehensive recognition of dialectics is necessary to understand how a spatial organization is shaped. Without this understanding it is difficult to value the contribution of planning practices performed by communities to a better spatial organization.

**Keywords: Planning practices, community initiatives, Galicia, dialectics, informality**

### **1. Introduction**

The changing and shaping of places by local communities are rapidly gaining attention in (rural) development studies, human geography and spatial planning (Healey *et al.*, 2008; Shove *et al.*, 2010; Woods, 2010). The influence of local communities on their environment is now considered to be of vital importance for sustainable social, economic and environmental development (Ray, 1999; Booher, 2008; Healey *et al.*, 2008; Friedmann, 2010). This paper addresses how communities shape their living environment from the perspective of spatial planning. In essence, spatial planning is about decision-making aiming to coordinate different processes of spatial organization (Van Assche and Verschraegen,

2008). Spatial planning is generally associated with governmental activity: coordination that is aimed at regulation of land uses and distribution of public services (Allmendinger, 2002; Hall and Tewdwr-Jones, 2010). Nevertheless, the influence of other actors, like communities, is becoming increasingly important in planning studies (Healey, 2006). Spatial planning is a discipline that connects spatial practices with the process that led to the development and implementation of, in this case, community initiatives. Approaching community initiatives from the perspective of spatial planning enables us understand not only the process that led to initiative (like in many rural development studies), but also the impact of the result within a wider spatial context. Furthermore,

this perspective provides insight in the interaction between governmental planning practices and the ways in which communities plan.

Taking planning efforts of non-governmental actors seriously led to a fragmentation of spatial planning domain (Davoudi and Pendlebury, 2010). Most planning studies agree that spatial planning has a formal and an informal side (Allmendinger, 2002; Healey, 2006; McFarlane and Waibel, 2012). The formal side of planning is generally associated with the governance of territory, based on a set of laws and governmental rules and regulations. The informal side of planning refers to spatial coordination of activities performed at a local level, based on unwritten laws, social networks and trust (Van Assche *et al.*, 2012). Traditionally, planning studies focus on the formal side of planning, foregrounding the role of governments and more technical solutions for an improvement of living circumstances. More recently also the perspective of informal planning is introduced (AlSayyad and Roy, 2004; Roy, 2005; Innes *et al.*, 2007). At the moment the theoretical concept of informal planning practices hardly travels beyond the studies performed in the Global South. As Van Assche *et al.* (2012) state:

*"The insights that these studies have provided about the relation between formal and informal practices, however, have rarely been applied to other places. They did not lead to a rethinking of planning as such, either within the planning discipline or elsewhere"*

Seen from this point, formal and informal planning practices form two different worlds. However, many, if not all, planning practices are not purely formal or informal, but the result of both types of (spatial) coordination (Healey, 2006; Van Assche *et al.*, 2012). This paper explores how a combination of insights in formal and informal planning practices, in relation to the ways in which governments and communities plan, complements our understandings of spatial planning.

Empirical research in rural Galicia, an Autonomous Region in North-Western Spain, reveals how an interaction of formal and informal planning practices shape the spatial organization of two communities. Wellman and Leighton (1979) define communities as following: *"Definitions of community tend to include three ingredients: networks of interpersonal ties (outside of the household) which provide sociability and support to members, residence in a common locality, and share solidarity sentiments and activities"*. These ingredients also apply for the communities we studied in Galicia. The common locality (the parish) forms the basis of the community. The activities of the community

members are still largely linked to the spatial entity of the parish. Governmental planning aimed at land use regulation and an even distribution of public services exists in Galicia, but is not fully developed or implemented by all tiers of government (Selman, 2006; Meijer, 2009). In meanwhile, some local communities established their own planning practices, for sports facilities, tourism and even health care.

This article builds on the differences and complementarities between formal and informal planning practices. In the next theoretical section, the concept of a dialectic (interaction) between formal and informal practices is introduced to explain how planning practices evolve over time. The result section analyses two examples of planning practices coordinated by communities. It shows how two communities have become planners in a context of partly performed governmental formal planning. The discussion section of this paper exposes how these planning practices influenced both formal and informal institutions at a local level. The discussion is followed by a final conclusion and recommendations for further research and practice.

## **2. The dialectic of formal and informal planning practices**

Formal and informal planning practices are often considered as dichotomies. Many studies speak for example of the formal-informal divide (McFarlane and Waibel, 2012), or discuss formal planning practices separately for informal planning practices (and vice versa) (Porter, 2011a). A formal planning practice reflects the influence zone of governments and their ways of making planning work. According to McFarlane and Waibel (2012) informal planning practices occur when governments are absent, unwilling to act or have withdrawn themselves. This raised dichotomy, and consequent association of informal planning practices with uncontrolled, negative developments, makes informal planning a problematic concept in formalized planning contexts. Informal planning practices are *'the other'* to the already familiar formalized planning systems (Porter, 2011b). Even so, many authors have tried to explore the interaction between formal and formal planning. According to Roy (2009c) the division between these planning practices is not static but ever-shifting, depending on what is regarded as formal and informal. Roy (2009a) states that this labeling depends on who is in power: long standing informal settlements might remain informal, while equal illegal suburban developments can be authorized with a formal status by governmental decision. Altrock (2012) attempts to open up informal planning practices towards Western, more formalized

planning contexts. He describes formal and informal planning practices (formality and informality) as a continuum: some situations are more formal or informal than others. Within this continuum, informality is explained as a replacement of formal planning practices. When formal planning procedures are none-existent or (partly) applied, a vacuum occurs. This vacuum is subject to informal planning practices: other actors than governments start to coordinate their spatial organization in informal ways. In this respect, Van Assche *et al.* (2012) claim that pure formality does not exist. No state or planning agent can fully control spatial organization and practices:

*"In practice, the coordination of policies and practices affecting spatial organization will always entail a combination of formal and informal institutions. In other words, purely formal planning does not exist, whereas purely informal planning will always remain vulnerable"*

Van Assche *et al.* (2012) speak of a dialectic (interaction) between formal planning and informal planning practices. This means that formal and informal planning practices affect and shape each other continuously, on both functional and conceptual level. They address the concept dialectics from an institutional perspective, based on the work of institutional economist Douglass North. North (1991) defines institutions as *"humanly devised constraints that structure political, economic and social interactions"*. Institutions provide the rules of the game, which eventually (in case of spatial planning) result into concrete planning practices. North (1990) distinguishes formal and informal institutions as follows: *"On the one hand formal institutions involve written rules, political and economical rules, laws and contracts"*. In planning, these formal institutions lead to formal planning practices, like the establishment and following of procedures, authorities writing policies and regulation of property rights (Ellickson, 1991; Alexander, 2005). Informal institutions on the other hand involve codes of conduct, norms of behavior and conventions. Informal planning practices are more difficult to pinpoint, they involve the social interactions in planning processes: perception, beliefs, shared values and behavior of the involved actors (Reimer *et al.*, 2014). North (1990) underlines that this distinction is not exhaustive or static. What starts as an informal institution can become a formalized institution over time: a rationalization of what used to be an informal daily routine (Van Assche *et al.*, 2012). Formal institutions, on the other hand, are interpreted, used, selected, combined and produced in ways that differ from the original set of procedures, plans or even laws (Van Dijk and Beunen, 2009). How institutions

evolve over time is largely path-dependent: historical events, institutional backgrounds, existing formal and informal institutions influence and limit future decisions (North, 1990). Spatial planning practices are shaped by the dialectic of formal and informal institutions. This implies that the performance of both formal and informal planning practices should always be understood in a relation within a wider set of institutions and social contexts (Van Assche *et al.*, 2012). Together the planning efforts of governments, communities and other actors form an assemblage of practices that affect and shape the spatial organization of society.

Studying planning from the perspective of dialectics leads to several new insights. This paper studies planning practices in Southern European context. Here formal planning practices have never been implemented as expansively as in other North-Western European countries, like the United Kingdom, The Netherlands and Germany (Healey, 2006; Hall and Tewdwr-Jones, 2010; Domingo and Beunen, 2013). Therefore the influence of informal institutions on planning practices performed by governments is more common. The implementation of most planning practices (like the development of infrastructure, business parks, energy plants) follows a political and clientelistic logic (Keating, 2001; Batterbury, 2002). This means that, governmental officials and politicians use their social networks to distribute government services, amongst others via spatial planning (Healey, 2006). A clientelistic logic implies that formal institutions are, intentionally, very open towards informal institutions. Though spatial policies might seem neutral on paper, meant to ensure an equal distribution of facilities, their implementation can follow a very different logic. A politician from a certain region can make sure the policy is implemented there first, for example to satisfy his electoral body. Following Van Assche *et al.* (2012): these existing dialectics between formal and informal institutions have a determining impact on the functioning of formal planning procedures. Moreover, within this context it is very difficult to distinguish formal from informal institutions, and formal from informal planning practices. The dialectic between both is that intertwined, that what would be interpreted as informal in a Western context, has become rationalized and largely accepted in a clientelistic context.

The dialectics underlying the functioning of spatial planning also influence opportunities for bottom-up practices. On the one hand, clientelism creates opportunities: it involves a direct way of engaging government into the lives and needs of local actors, leading to higher political commitment and local responses (Healey, 2006). Like politicians, initiators of bottom-up practices

may use their political networks to obtain subsidies as pilot projects or for smooth settlement of formal procedures (Roseman, 1996; Batterbury, 2002). On the other hand clientelism forms a thread for bottom-up developments. In clientelistic systems governmental resources are often distributed unequally and unable to protect the position of weak groups in society (Keating, 2001; Domínguez-García *et al.*, 2012). Marginal rural regions typically hold such weak positions. These regions often have to deal with a declining and ageing population, making them electorally less significant but also in a higher need for health care or other social services. However these difficult circumstances trigger the adaptive capacity of communities and increases resilience. The sense of 'belonging to a community', but also local leadership and external challenges increases the adaptive capacity of communities to deal with difficult circumstances (Scott, 1990; McManus *et al.*, 2012). One of the coping strategies of resilient communities is the development of community initiatives that fill the vacuum governments leave in providing facilities. In the next sections we will further elaborate on this phenomenon.

### 3. Material and methods

#### 3.1. Study Area

Galicia has an area of 29574 km<sup>2</sup>, and around 2.8 million inhabitants. It is divided in four provinces that are considered predominantly rural (Lugo and Ourense) and intermediate rural (A Coruña, Pontevedra) regions. Galicia has a total of 314 municipalities, considered as Local Administrative Units. Nevertheless, the parish (sub-municipal administrative division of religious origin) has been historically a reference for community organization and management (De Torres-Luna and Pazo-Labrador, 1990; García-Pazos, 2009)), and it is still nowadays considered as important from a social, administrative, political and anthropological point of view (García-Pazos, 2009). The number of parishes is 3772 (IGE, 2013).

The majority of the land of Galicia (97%) is private property, with a dual structure: individual private property and common land tenure (the so-called '*Monte Veciñal en Man Común*', also referred to as MVMC or '*monte*'). MVMCs account for 22% of the total surface (673000ha). Galician MVMCs are unique common property systems, different to those in other parts of Europe (Bouhier, 1979; Marey-Pérez *et al.*, 2006). Each MVMC is linked to a town or parish, so the property rights are attained by fixed residence. There are about 2800 communities with MVMC, with an average size of 237 ha (Balboa-López *et al.*, 2012). Typically, the management of the MVMC is done by the community (CMVMC), constituted as Assembly of Commoners, who

elects an Executive Board. This Executive Board is responsible for management planning and decisions – which in any case must be approved by the assembly (Gómez-Vázquez *et al.*, 2009). MVMCs have been affected by the transition from the feudal regime to modernity in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in several ways: a) appropriation by new local landlords in what was called '*amortization*' (i.e. change of ownership from nobility or the church to private hands); b) misclassification as '*public forests*' in official records (instead of '*private communal forests*'), thus prejudicing small farmers depending on them for subsistence. Top-down afforestation policies, initiated in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, were extensively promoted during Franco's regime (1939-1975). These policies conditioned both access to, and multiple use of land. After the dictatorship, nearly 75% of the parishes regained ownership over the MVMC's.

The main governmental planning instruments for rural areas can be divided in three different types: land uses planning, land ownership, and rural development. The main instrument for land use planning are the General Municipality Plans (Plan Xeral de Ordenación Municipal), which are developed at local levels, and oriented to both the planning of urban and rural areas. Despite being the planning instrument with the higher potential of regulation for the uses of land, only 22% of the municipalities are completely adapted to the more recent legislation about land planning (CMATI, 2014). Also there is a lack in coordination between planning among neighboring municipalities, regardless of integrative instruments from upper administration levels, like Land Planning Directives (Directrices de Ordenación do Territorio), or Territorial Integrated Plans (Plans Territoriais Integrados). Regarding land ownership, one of the most relevant instruments in rural areas are Land Consolidation projects (Crecente-Maseda *et al.*, 2001; 2002), oriented to solve problem of fragmentation, and in some cases the lack of rural infrastructures. Also the Galician Land Bank (Banco de Terras de Galicia, BANTEGAL) is a regional government institution oriented towards the mobility of land ownership, mainly acting as facilitator for land hiring (Santiago-Iglesias, 2010). Finally, planning oriented towards rural development was for many instances dependent on LEADER methodology-based initiatives: the LEADER itself, but also PRODER and AGADER (Rodríguez-Couso *et al.*, 2006; Pérez-Fra *et al.*, 2012), developed respectively from the state and regional administration to support rural development in those areas lacking EU financed LEADER projects. Even when not exactly considered as formal planning, it is also important to highlight the importance of cooperatives as organization

entities for farmers and primary sector producers, and their role in the development of rural communities (Fandiño *et al.*, 2006).

### 3.2. Methodology

The empirical study underlying this research consisted of a qualitative field study (Schatzman and Strauss, 1973). This method was chosen as the proper method to identify the actors' behavior in the decision making processes oriented to spatial planning. This study was carried out in Galicia, during September-October 2013. During this period ten different examples of community planning practices have been identified and were visited (Figure 1). These examples were selected through snowball sampling (Atkinson and Flint, 2001); several key informants were asked whether they knew examples of community or informal planning practices. Later also respondents were asked if they knew more projects like theirs and if they could introduce us. After ten field visits the level of saturation was reached: key informants and respondents hardly came up with unknown projects. Snowball sampling is a research method mostly used in qualitative studies to find hidden populations or hard to reach subjects for investigation (Atkinson and Flint, 2001). Most community planning practices have not been documented well, nor are they widely known by a larger public. They are often not represented in governmental documents or policies, do not exist in databases and many of them do not have websites or are featured in newspaper articles. They are represented informally and through social networks: if you do not have access to them, it can be difficult to reach subjects of informal planning practices. In this research, the method was also justified by the need to track the network of relationships among the actors (e.g. with governments and other projects). All field visits provided insights in formal and informal planning practices performed by communities; however, some to a larger extend than others. We will discuss the two examples which better exemplify the adoption of informal and formal planning practices performed by communities in the study area. These two examples, the parishes of Muimenta and Zobra, represent most characteristics of what community planning entails and how it interacts with aspects of more formal governmental planning. Compared to the other examples, these communities established the highest number of finished projects, had a long duration and involved varied interests (environmental, social and economic) and stakeholders. Due to the long history of planning practices performed by these two communities (over 30 years), the interaction with governmental planning practices could be identified and traced more elaborately than in the case of short running

or unfinished projects. Table 1 summarizes these characteristics for Muimenta and Zobra. (Table 1)

During the field visits the project locations were visited and 7 semi-structured interviews (Weiss, 1995) were held with the initiators of the projects. During these interviews questions were asked about the coming into being of the project, incentive and process of decision-making/implementation, involved stakeholders, relation with formal planning/authorities and their future plans. Next to the interviews, the project locations of community planning practices, have been visited with the interviewees (Schatzman and Strauss, 1973). These field visits provided more insight in the impact (the change of landscape and land use function in relation to the surrounding spatial organization of territory) of the community planning practices and proved to be a good method to access more detailed information. To gain a better understanding of the context of these examples also policy documents, websites and newspaper articles have been reviewed and 9 other involved stakeholders (representatives of NGO's, policy-makers at the regional governments) were interviewed. The analysis of the two selected examples consists of an interpretive narrative analysis (Yanow, 2000). The stories of the initiators of the projects have been interpreted as planning practices, reconstructed into narratives and mirrored against other sources of information. In the next sections these narratives are discussed topically to provide a complete image of the impact of the planning practice and their dialectics.

### 4. Results

The inhabitants of the parishes of Muimenta and Zobra form communities that initiate and perform planning practices, to provide services to their community members. The community of Muimenta is open and diffuse: they do not have a formal, representative body. The interviewed members agreed that all inhabitants of the parish are in principal part of the community. Though also inhabitants from other parishes benefit from these services and hold interpersonal ties with inhabitants of Muimenta, they are in essence not acknowledged as community members. The community of Zobra knows a stricter definition. The community is legally represented by the CMVMC, which manages the common property of the parish. Officially, only permanent household representatives (the head of the family) are member of the CMVMC, and have a right to make decisions. In practice, when the interviewees referred to the community of Zobra they were speaking about all actively involved inhabitants of the parish, including other household-members. In every community there are some key members that form the center of *'the network of*

*interpersonal ties*’ and take most responsibility for ‘*sociability and support*’ (Wellman and Leighton 1979). In Muimenta a group of five key members initiates most projects. In Zobra the key members occupy important positions within the CMVMC.

#### 4.1. Muimenta

Muimenta is a small town in the periphery of the municipality of Cospeito, in the northern of the province of Lugo. It has 836 inhabitants (IGE, 2013) and is the centre of a parish of the same name. Despite its size Muimenta is now a considerable economic and social centre, providing employment and a relatively large number of services to the greater region (including adjacent municipalities).

##### 4.1.1. Decision-making at community level

Muimenta has a long tradition in arranging public facilities informally. Since the early 1980’s the community initiated and built several public projects, like a medical centre, a sports park, a recreational area and the restoration of several historical buildings. These projects were voluntarily established with the communities’ own resources, on their own land and outside the dominion of the municipal administration. One of the key initiators, a former primary school teacher, explains the incentive for these community initiatives:

*“Normally, the municipalities focus on the development of the municipal capital. Then the other parishes are more or less left to fend for themselves (dejadas de la mano de Dios)... So we had to organize ourselves to have sports activities, medical centers, schools, meeting places...”*

Despite this statement, the people of Muimenta did not organize themselves in a formal way. There is no official coordinating committee or legal body representing the community. A CMVMC exists, but is considered of little importance by the community members since the MVMC-area is small and most decisions are made outside the CMVMC-assembly. However, there are many associations that cover the various interests within the community (sports, traditional games, entrepreneurs and businesses, culture, organization of various festivals) and represent most of the community members. When there is a certain need (e.g. for a medical centre) the representatives of these associations meet informally and discuss the outcome of the debate with the wider community. When there is a broad consensus among the various members, all community members are invited to a general meeting. Once decided what needs to be done and who will lead the project, community members are personally asked to contribute: sometimes financially, sometimes to provide labor or (if a

person has good contacts there) to contact the administration. But often a general meeting is not needed:

*“We are not like a big city, we do not need official meetings to organize something, but we meet in the bar, on the street or we talk over the phone and we start off...”*

(Associations representative, Muimenta)

Albeit the community does not have statutes or written agreements, there is one general unwritten rule: if you are in the organization of an initiative, you cannot have political ambitions. All interviewed community members opposed to political-colored projects, because strong support from one party could be withdrawn quickly if an opposing party gains majority during a subsequent governing period. The community prefers to remain independent from political support, even if this means they have to rely more on their own resources. The municipality of Cospeito is since the first democratic elections governed by a majority of the conservative, centre-right *Partido Popular*<sup>1</sup>; a political party not known for stimulating bottom-up local initiatives (Keating, 2001). Furthermore, the community’s preference for informal decision-making has a long and deep historical explanation:

*“Since always we have had a certain tradition in organizing things without being formal, because during the dictatorship [of Franco, author] associations were forbidden. [...] So, people met for arranging things, but could not do it formally. In this village there were also initiatives, people came together to arrange introduction of the telephone, electric lights, etc. In rural areas you could not afford to be individualistic like nowadays. In the early days the whole community needed to collaborate to get things done”*

(Retired primary school teacher, Muimenta)

##### 4.1.2. Building a football field and a medical centre

In the early 1980’s, the community established its first project: a football field at the edge of the village. In 1993 this football field was further expanded with stands, a tennis court and currently the community is building ‘*a casa de deportes*’ (canteen). To acquire sufficient land and funds, the sports associations held collections amongst their members and contacted local businesses for sponsoring. For latest expansion, the building of the canteen the municipality of Cospeito contributes 50% of the costs. A few years after the

<sup>1</sup> The Partido Popular (PP) is a conservative and Christian democratic political party, represented at national, regional and municipal level in Spain.

football field was built, in 1986, the community was in need of medical service. Without it, the inhabitants of Muimenta had to visit either the distanced municipal capital (Feira do Monte) or the even more distanced cities Lugo or Santiago for medical consultation. Especially the growing number of elderly and the lack of public transport increased the need for a local doctor's facility. The municipality appointed a family doctor, but the community had to provide a place for consultations. At first they rented a room in an apartment. Later they decided to build '*a casa do medico*' (medical centre) themselves, to avoid perennial rents (Figure 2). For this medical centre every community member was asked to pay, according to interviewed community members, a considerable amount of money<sup>2</sup>. The land was already community property (MCMV), but used by individual community members as allotment gardens. Though the greater community agreed in building a medical centre on this terrain, the individual users of the allotment gardens were more difficult to convince. They did not want to give up the land they had been farming for over 15 years. After some debate the problem was solved with a financial compensation of the individual users. All users then agreed to make the terrain available for common use. The medical centre occupies only a small part of the total acquired property. Later, in 1991, the community built there an exposition hall for cattle markets and local festivals. The remaining part of the property was assigned to the municipality for the building of a secondary school. (Figure 2)

#### 4.1.3. Interaction with governmental planning practices

During the field visit we asked whether they needed to request (building) permits for their projects. One of the community members responded ad rem: "*a veces hacemos trampa* (sometimes we cheat)". However they did not feel they were doing something illegal:

*"No, it is a-legal [with irony], that is different from doing something illegal. [...] For example, when we built the sports canteen, we had to do it a-legal because of a defect at the municipality, not because we had a problem. The municipality did not catalogue [allocate] these terrains as a sports facility, so we were not allowed to build there. [...] Only according to the law we did something illegal, but morally not as the terrain was in use as a sports field for more than 35 years"*

(Community member, Muimenta)

Despite some differences in interpretation of formal planning, the community of Muimenta does not have conflicts with the municipality or higher level authorities. The municipality does not object (anymore) to their projects, and pays for electricity and heating of the buildings. Sometimes they also subsidize new projects and activities, by paying part of the building costs. The reason for this compromising attitude is, according to the community, quite simple: Muimenta developed over the years into a (economically and socially) resilient town of a considerable electoral interest. Most projects have existed for a long time now and have proven to be stable and successful. Depopulation is less severe here as in other (surrounding) parishes, as the community has been able to maintain employment, public facilities and social housing.

In addition, the community felt that it was better if they planned their local environment: "*We know the area and the needs of the community; a policy-maker does not have this in-depth knowledge and is more inclined to make mistakes*". They name the example of a decorative fountain, placed at the centre of the village by the municipality. For the placement of the fountain a contracting firm had to cut several monumental trees. According to the villagers the responsible civil servant did not take the effort to have a look at the place when he decided to place the fountain.

#### 4.2. Zobra

Zobra is a parish located at the outer fringes of both the municipality of Lalín and the province of Pontevedra. Like Cospeito, Lalín has been perennially governed by the *Partido Popular* since the first elections in 1987. The parish of Zobra has 123 inhabitants (IGE, 2013). Besides several small settlements Zobra covers an area of over 1.400 ha of MCMV. This makes the CMVMC of Zobra one of the larger '*montes*' of Galicia; actually its surface exceeds the territory of some municipalities in Galicia (Simón-Fernández and Copena-Rodríguez, 2012). In the past the monte had mainly an agricultural function. Small-hold farmers used it to pasture their cattle, for bee-keeping, mining and wood production. Since 2000 the land use function of the monte has changed considerably: a multinational company placed 75 windmills on the hilltops. For the placement of the mills the community receives an annual financial compensation. The community chose to reinvest this compensation into new projects: they opened a community office and employed 8 people to facilitate community needs such as forest fire prevention, agricultural machinery and infrastructure maintenance. Furthermore they renovated old miners' houses into touristic accommodation and developed several touristic routes (for walking and horse riding). These

<sup>2</sup> Every family within the parish of Muimenta was asked to pay 12500 ESP in 1986.



touristic services are developed to generate an extra revenue and employment to facilitate the community. Though the community was active for decades, they were able to establish the larger projects since the arrival of the windmills in 2000:

*“Until 2000 there were not really plans or projects made by the community, because there was no money. Since 2000, well, there were some mining houses [...] we rehabilitated them and transformed them into 5 apartments for rural tourism”*

(Former secretary of CMVMC do Zobra)

#### 4.2.1. Defining the property

The placement of the windmills now resulted to be beneficial for the community of Zobra. However, the windmills were not placed without struggle. At first the community was not in favor of placing them on the monte. Since the end of the Franco regime (in 1975) they campaigned to have the monte acknowledged as their common property. The boundaries of the MVMC of Zobra were not documented before and were claimed by different municipalities, provinces and private owners (La Voz de Galicia, 2004). After a verdict of the Galician Higher Court for Justice (Tribunal Superior de Xustiza de Galicia) in 1993, the people of Zobra established the first, formalized community of montes (CMVMC) in Galicia. The CMVMC is now again the private owner of the monte.

Several community members were afraid the windmill park would harm the initiatives they developed on the monte after having defended them for several decades. Furthermore, the community was familiar with the unsatisfactory negotiation results of other CMVMC's; many of them got a small compensation for leasing land to wind farms. Even though there were many concerns among the community members, the former secretary of the CMVMC de Zobra explained that rejection of the windmills was not an option. The windmill company already received a concession from the municipality of Lalín for placing the windmills. If the community would reject to cooperate, the land might be expropriated because of a larger public interest: the production of sustainable energy. Also in other CMVMC's threats of expropriation are a familiar practice (La Voz de Galicia, 2001; El País, 2007).

After a two year negotiation process Zobra got one of the better deals for wind energy. Still the representatives feel that the compensation they receive is not fair compared to the income the company generates, nor to the additional compensation the municipality receives:

*“In 2001, when they placed the windmills, we got to know the bad side [of the*

*negotiation] as well. The company provided us with a very small amount [of money] compared to what the park produces per year; these are African practices”*

Nevertheless, the compensation they receive allows the community to act more independently; they now have a budget to fulfill the community's needs and diversify their economic resources. Before, they had to consult the municipality for basic facilities; which often involved a time-consuming and complicated process. The former secretary explains that, when the community asked for electricity and paved roads in 1975, they were asked to donate 390 ha of MVMC to the municipality in return:

*“When democracy came, these practices proved to be anti-constitutional. [...] In other villages, none of the neighbors needed to exchange land for roads or electric lights. This was the fundament of the dispute with the municipality. Because all the mayors that governed since pretended not to know, not to preoccupy about this [that basic public facilities should be provided without returning favors]. They always consider us as like the ones of Asterix and Obelix: who needs to be crushed and that's it”*

(Former secretary of CMVMC do Zobra)

According to the secretary (of the CMVMC) the municipality still claims a part of the MVMC, as part of the deal they made in 1975. It is one of the many struggles they have with the municipality. The former secretary of Zobra outlines that because of these disputes, at a certain moment also permits for regular activities (for wood cutting, etc.) were not granted. (Figure 3)

#### 4.2.2. Touristic development and future plans

The rehabilitation of the miners' houses was less complicated than reclaiming the monte. The regional government (Xunta) was at that time (2007) ruled by the socialistic parties PSOE and BNG<sup>3</sup> and much in favor of stimulating local, community-owned initiatives. The Ministry of Rural Affairs provided a subsidy to rebuild the houses for touristic purposes and helped out in acquiring building permissions. In the future the community would like to expand touristic facilities (Figure 3). With the income from tourism the community can provide more employment and a larger budget for maintenance of roads and forest fire prevention. The chairman of the community realizes it is not easy to achieve these goals. He is chairing the community since the first

<sup>3</sup> The PSOE (*Partido Socialista Obrero Español*) is a social democratic political party, represented at national, regional and municipal level. The BNG (*Bloque Nacionalista Galego*) is a nationalist, left-winged political party, represented at regional and municipal level.



collective action in 1975, yet there is no successor. Like in Muimenta, the chairman and secretary hope that with preservation of economic activities and basic facilities, young people are less prone to leave the community and more willing to take on some responsibilities themselves. Moreover, they believe that active participation in a community is one of the fundamentals for democracy:

*"I believe that the communities of mountains are the schools of democracy. [...] Now, the elections lost their importance, but the CMVCM-elections used to be the most important elections, rather than national or regional. [...] At the assemblies people can say what they want, but in an ordered way. The board has always been open to ideas, [...] and transparent about their actions. ... while in there is much corruption in this region"*

## 5. Discussion

The above examples illustrate how two communities in Galicia developed initiatives in the absence of government-led planning policies. In the next sections we will discuss how planning practices in Galicia relate to formal and informal planning studies. Subsequently, we will argue how a dialectical approach enables us to understand the complexities of planning in Galicia beyond the dichotomy of formality and informality. Planning practices in Muimenta and Zobra could be interpreted as a failure of formal planning. Several planning scholars specified the purpose of planning as *'the governmental organization and regulation of an (more) equal spatial distribution of facilities, nuisance and chances for development'* (Healey, 2006; Selman, 2006; Rydin, 2011). The municipalities of Cospeito and Lalín did not succeed in providing facilities or infrastructure for the basic needs of the communities, nor they established a strategic vision or land allocation plans to regulate the use of the territory. Focusing on this formal perspective however, does not pay sufficient attention to the efforts of the community members to improve their living circumstances via planning practices. Moreover, both communities felt they did a better job than the municipality could have done, if they had made plans. They argued that their knowledge of the territory and their needs could not have been replaced by the analyses policy makers make at a distance. In the case of Zobra one can question whether it is up to the municipality to develop extensive plans, since a large part of the territory is property of the community and has a public use. Zobra, as well as many other parishes, is the legal owner of the territory and has the mandate to utilize it as they decide (Balboa-López *et al.*, 2012). Even though the classification of the MVMC as municipal

property during the dictatorship of Franco has been rectified by the regional government, some municipalities still hold property claims towards these properties. Not only the community of Zobra has to deal with this type of conflict: 10 % of all CMVMC's are in conflict with authorities about ownership and utilization of the *monte* (Gómez-Vázquez *et al.*, 2009). The example of Zobra illustrates a divergence between the formation of formal institutions by higher level authorities, like property rights, and the implementation of them at a local level. In principal, the implementation of formal planning policies relies on a unilateral interpretation of formal institutions (Tubío-Sánchez *et al.*, 2012). However, diverging viewpoints about what property rights or municipal responsibilities complicate the enforcement of formal institutions. These differences in interpretation of formality lead to a dialectic of formal and informal coping strategies, enacted by governments and communities.

The informal perspective on planning would have emphasized the efforts of the communities to improve living circumstances via planning practices. Informal planning provides insight in how non-governmental actors shape the spatial organization of (their) territory. Both communities did not practice planning like governments would have done, but made decisions locally based on unwritten laws and social networks. Traditionally, in many (rural) communities decisions were made in this way. In later centuries these decision-making structures were (partly) replaced by governments (Woods, 2010). Though community decision-making is focused at concrete, short-term objectives, the communities are aware of the long term implication of their practices. According to them their projects have political significance: via self organization they challenge the responsibility of the municipalities to provide public facilities in peripheral communities as well. In both cases municipalities were not supportive towards their initiatives. In Zobra this resulted in ongoing disputes about (collective) ownership and undermining of the community's mandate. In Muimenta, conflicts were based on disagreements about the provision of permissions. As in many Western countries, in Galicia permits and concessions must be requested for new buildings or land use changes. The lack of land allocation plans in Zobra and Muimenta enhances clientelistic practices, since approval depends on personal judgments of municipal policy-makers or politicians. We agree with Van Assche *et al.* (2012) that not only a lack of formal institutions, but particularly complex planning contexts (like clientelism) creates spaces for alternative forms of planning. However, if these alternatives are purely informal they will always remain vulnerable: formal regulation complicates, but can also

strengthen the position of communities. For the community of Zobra formalization of their property rights and support from the Xunta secured their position. Most studies about informal planning do not elaborate on the possibility of a more harmonious or subtle relation with authorities over time. Authors like Roy (2009b, 2009c, 2010), Watson (2007) and Simone (2004), focus on insurgence, conflicts, illegal activities and inevitability of informal practices in their research. Within the context of their research in the global South (South East Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa specifically) this focus is understandable; authorities are distanced and their role in the development of community initiatives remains absent or negative. Also for the communities of Muimenta and Zobra conflicts were inevitable when they started their initiatives as informal planning practices. Nevertheless, over time their relationship with authorities and their planning practices became more constructive.

The concept of dialects is essential to understand the complexity of planning practices in Galicia: it exposes how formal and informal institutions evolved during the establishment of community planning practices. The ongoing dialectic between different institutions and practices complicate a clear distinction between formal and informal practices. Within the parish of Zobra, one can argue that the CMVMC is the formal planning authority: their decisions are embedded in statutes and the legal acknowledgment of their property. The same goes for Muimenta: every community member is familiar with how decisions related to spatial organization are made: they have become institutionalized over time as well. However, legally they are not planning authorities. The blurring of formal and informal institutions can be exemplified by the use of the expropriation law in Zobra for building a wind park. At the time of field work in Galicia. The municipality of Lalín announced that the community of Zobra would be expropriated if they did not agree in the building of a wind mill park. Though the official argument for expropriation was based on sustainable development, it is likely<sup>4</sup> that economic benefits for municipalities play as well an important role in granting concessions for windmill parks. In this respect, the expropriation law got a new meaning: it was used as a power instrument to secure economic benefits for the municipality and windmill company. Also in Muimenta governmental planning practices were affected by the planning practices at community level. When

the initiatives of the community of Muimenta proved to be stable and successful overtime, it strengthened their position as a negotiation partner towards the municipality of the Cospeito. For their later projects they received additional subsidies and the municipality now provides activities in buildings the community constructed. Over time the planning practices of the municipality changed, providing more support for planning practices at a local level.

Planning practices are not only the result of a dialectic between institutions or different planning levels, but also of historical events and how they obtained meaning. The planning practices of communities and governments are shaped through history, they are path dependent. The performance of future planning policies or community initiatives will also be shaped according to current dialectics. The planning practices of both communities also evolved over time. Both indicated that their projects are rooted in experiences during the regime of Franco. During the dictatorship people in remote communities were reliant to self-governance for improvement of living circumstances. During the final days of this regime, communities obtained possibilities to lobby for infrastructure and facilities and/or create these facilities themselves (for a detailed analysis see Roseman, 1996). Furthermore, the transition towards democracy increased their awareness for regional culture and preservation of local values; like the use of the MVMC. The secretary of Zobra argued that communities are the schools for democracy: here people learn to be responsible for their community, in economic, environmental and social perspective. A historical perspective towards planning helps us to understand the mechanisms that shaped planning practices in both Zobra and Muimenta. These mechanisms not only involve planning policies developed by governments, but also the influence of political networks, adaption capacities of communities and ad hoc decision making.

## 6. Conclusion

In Galicia, planning practices performed by rural communities have a long tradition. Over decades these activities unlocked a diverse set of endogenous development potentials, leading to a more inclusive use of local knowledge, tailor made solutions, resilient communities, problem ownership and local capacity building. Planning practices performed at a local level have an important role in the functioning and development of many (marginal) rural communities. The above discussed examples of planning practices in Muimenta and Zobra showed that through locally developed initiatives the communities were able to deal with economic and demographic decline and improve local living circumstances.

<sup>4</sup> Besides by the two discussed communities, this issue was raised by three other interviewed CMVMC's, the umbrella organization ORGACMM (A Organización Galega de Comunidades de Montes Veciñais en Man Común) and is reflected in newspaper articles (see e.g. El País, 2007). Also during more informal occasions Galician people expressed their concerns about the use of the expropriation law

The discussion showed that maintaining the dichotomy between formal and informal planning practices is not fruitful to understand the complexity of planning in Galicia. Planning in Galicia, and many other regions, is layered: one layer consists of planning practices that are performed by governments and another of planning practices performed by local communities. Both layers have their own dynamics and in both planning is practiced in formal and informal ways. Planning by governments follows the rational of procedures, regulations, but also of political ambitions: like clientelism and idealism. Compared to governmental planning practices, where objectives and instruments have been formalized and defined at length, community planning (due to its informal character) takes diverse forms. Community planning practices are based on networks of trust, unwritten laws and ad hoc coordination. Planning at community level is a reaction to crises and needs experienced by, with a less dependence on administrative hurdles. Nowadays planning at community level still resembles the organization of traditional communities, like the CMVMC, that once settled the base for organization of agricultural and social activities in rural areas.

Both types of planning practices are not static, but evolve over time. This can be due to internal dynamics: overtime communities become more aware of how they would like to make decisions and institutionalized these processes. Governments went through likewise processes. Changes can also be unlocked by external dynamics (or from the other planning 'layer'): governmental planning practices change when confronted with practices performed by communities and vice versa. Planning regulations established by governments obtain new meanings when they are implemented. During the implementation process policies and regulations are confronted with local circumstances or other interests of implementers have (the planning of the windmill park in Zobra is an example of the latter). Planning at community level is even more fluid, communities are often challenged to find solutions to adjust to (or avoid) governmental expectations or demands. Consequently they change their strategies and the way they practice planning. The result is an ongoing dialectic between planning practices by governments and communities, forming an assemblage of practices that shapes the spatial organization of a territory.

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Table 1. Characteristics of planning practices in Muimenta and Zobra, based on interview results and in field observations

| <b>Muimenta</b>   | <b>Zobra</b>  |
|---|---|
| Practices are initiated by inhabitants of the parish Muimenta                       | Practices are initiated by CMVMC of Zobra   |
| Performed planning practices are aimed at medical, sports and economical facilities | Performed planning practices are aimed at environmental, infrastructural and economic development of the parish |
| Planning practices have a spatial impact  | Planning practices have a spatial impact  |
| Planning practices do not form part of formal planning policies                     | Planning practices do not form part of formal planning policies   |
| First project was established in 1986   | First (planning) project was established in 2001 (CMVMC was founded in 1978)                                    |
| Initiators of planning practices do not form a formal organization                  | The CMVMC is a formal organization  |
| Initiators established various projects over time                                   | Initiators established various projects over time   |





Figure 1. Field visit locations in Galicia (Díaz-Varela)



Figure 2. Medical centre in Muimenta (Meijer)





Figure 3. Touristic infrastructure in Zobra: route map and miners houses, rehabilitated for touristic accommodation (Meijer).